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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE

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RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3037

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001468

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN/CHINA: BILATERAL RELATIONS ARE STRONG, BUT CHINESE NATIONALS FIND WORKING IN TURKMENISTAN A CHALLENGE

REF: ASHGABAT 1148

Classified By: Charge Sylvia Reed Curran for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Recently arrived Chinese ambassador Wu Hongbin describes bilateral relations as positive because of mutual respect and understanding between the two nations. He underscored that China's chief interest in Turkmenistan is energy and that his country's pipeline project serves as a counterweight to Russian influence in the energy sphere. Despite strong relations between the two governments, resident or semi-resident Chinese nationals are often frustrated in their dealing with Turkmen business partners, government officials, and local residents. However, in Wu's view, it could be worse. At least one does not find the backlash against Chinese products (and Chinese traders) that one finds in some other countries. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Recently arrived Chinese ambassador Wu Hongbin told us on November 3 that relations between Turkmenistan and China are extremely positive, because of mutual understanding and respect between the two nations. Furthermore, he noted that China's policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries means that China will not criticize another country's domestic policies, which the Turkmen appreciate. China's main interest in Turkmenistan is energy. Wu said China is permitted to work onshore, unlike other foreigners, because it serves as a counterbalance to Russia and the near monopoly of Russian pipelines for the export of Turkmen gas. He added that the permission for CNPC to work onshore was also a sign of respect between the presidents of the two countries.

¶3. (C) Although Wu served many years in the former Soviet Union, including Russia, Belarus, and Tajikistan, he said he was having trouble adjusting to working in Turkmenistan. Wu, who has been a diplomat since 1979, said he was shocked how the Turkmenistan government seems to function unlike any other government on earth. He said he felt it was very rude that he was summoned to appear at a meeting with the foreign minister with only 20 minutes notice (COMMENT: We know of cases when heads of missions of been told that the Foreign Minister wants to see them "now." END COMMENT.) Despite Wu's negative comments, he nonetheless described Foreign

Minister Rashid Meredov as "the smartest person in the Turkmenistan government." (COMMENT: We agree. END COMMENT.)

¶ 14. (C) Wu said non-official Chinese have their share of problems dealing with local officials and the bureaucracy. He said more than 1,000 Chinese work in the north of the country on the CNPC pipeline project. They often get into trouble with locals and local officials and turn to the embassy for help. Unfortunately, Wu said, he has to tell them that they are here as private workers, and he can't help them. He also tells them the embassy can't mediate matters between private citizens and the Turkmen.

5.(C) Chinese businessmen, who have opened factories with Turkmen partners, also have their share of complaints. Wu asserted that the Turkmen partners (government entities) don't care about the (mainly textile) factories, because the Turkmenistan government only cares about oil and gas. It is a real source of frustration to the Chinese businessmen, several of whom are threatening to pull up stakes.

¶ 16. (C) Wu said he is grateful that one does not find the anti-Chinese feeling in Turkmenistan that you might find in other Central Asian countries, where people rail against "low-quality" Chinese goods. He reasoned the Turkmen have no such complaints, because Turkmen shuttle traders rather than Chinese bring in these products. Wu asserted that Chinese selling in local markets would cause a backlash.

¶ 17. (C) COMMENT: While the countries may get along swimmingly

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(reftel), it seems that Chinese nationals here may encounter conflicts similar to what they have found in Africa where China builds large projects with their own labor rather than using exclusively local hires. The cultural clash between the Chinese workers and the locals is almost inevitable. Meanwhile, Chinese businessmen and government delegations are frequent visitors to Ashgabat, expanding ties between the two countries. END COMMENT.

CURRAN